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Iucolano

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(54) **HIGH-POWER AND HIGH-FREQUENCY HERETOSTRUCTURE FIELD-EFFECT TRANSISTOR**

(71) Applicant: **STMICROELECTRONICS S.R.L.**,
Agrate Brianza (IT)

(72) Inventor: **Ferdinando Iucolano**, Gravina di
Catania (IT)

(73) Assignee: **STMICROELECTRONICS S.R.L.**,
Agrate Brianziana (IT)

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6, 2016, now Pat. No. 10,050,136.

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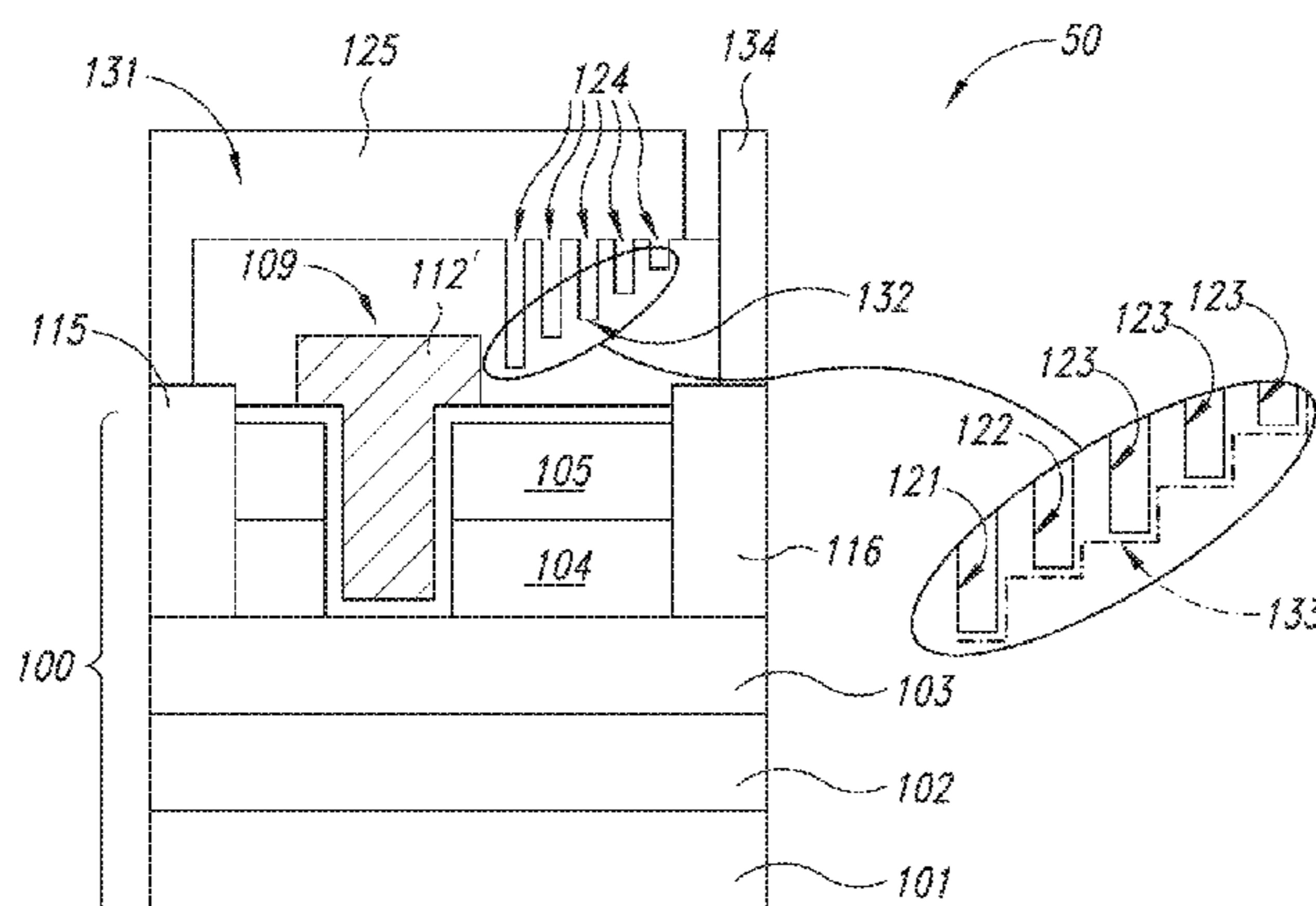
Primary Examiner — David S Blum

(74) *Attorney, Agent, or Firm* — Seed IP Law Group LLP

(57) **ABSTRACT**

In an HEMT device, a gate region is formed in a wafer having a channel layer, a barrier layer, and a passivation layer, overlying each other. Drain and source electrodes are formed in the wafer, on different sides of the gate region. A dielectric layer is formed over the gate region and over the passivation layer. Selective portions of the dielectric layer are removed by a plurality of etches so as to form one or more cavities between the gate region and the drain electrode. The one or more cavities have a plurality of steps at an increasing distance from the wafer moving from the gate region to the drain electrode. The cavity is then filled with conductive material to form a field plate coupled to the source electrode, extending over the gate region, and having a surface facing the wafer and having a plurality of steps.

23 Claims, 6 Drawing Sheets



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H01L 29/40 (2006.01)
H01L 29/20 (2006.01)
H01L 29/66 (2006.01)
H01L 29/417 (2006.01)
H01L 29/423 (2006.01)

(52) **U.S. Cl.**

CPC .. *H01L 29/66431* (2013.01); *H01L 29/66462*
(2013.01); *H01L 29/7786* (2013.01); *H01L*
29/41766 (2013.01); *H01L 29/4236* (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

USPC 438/309
See application file for complete search history.

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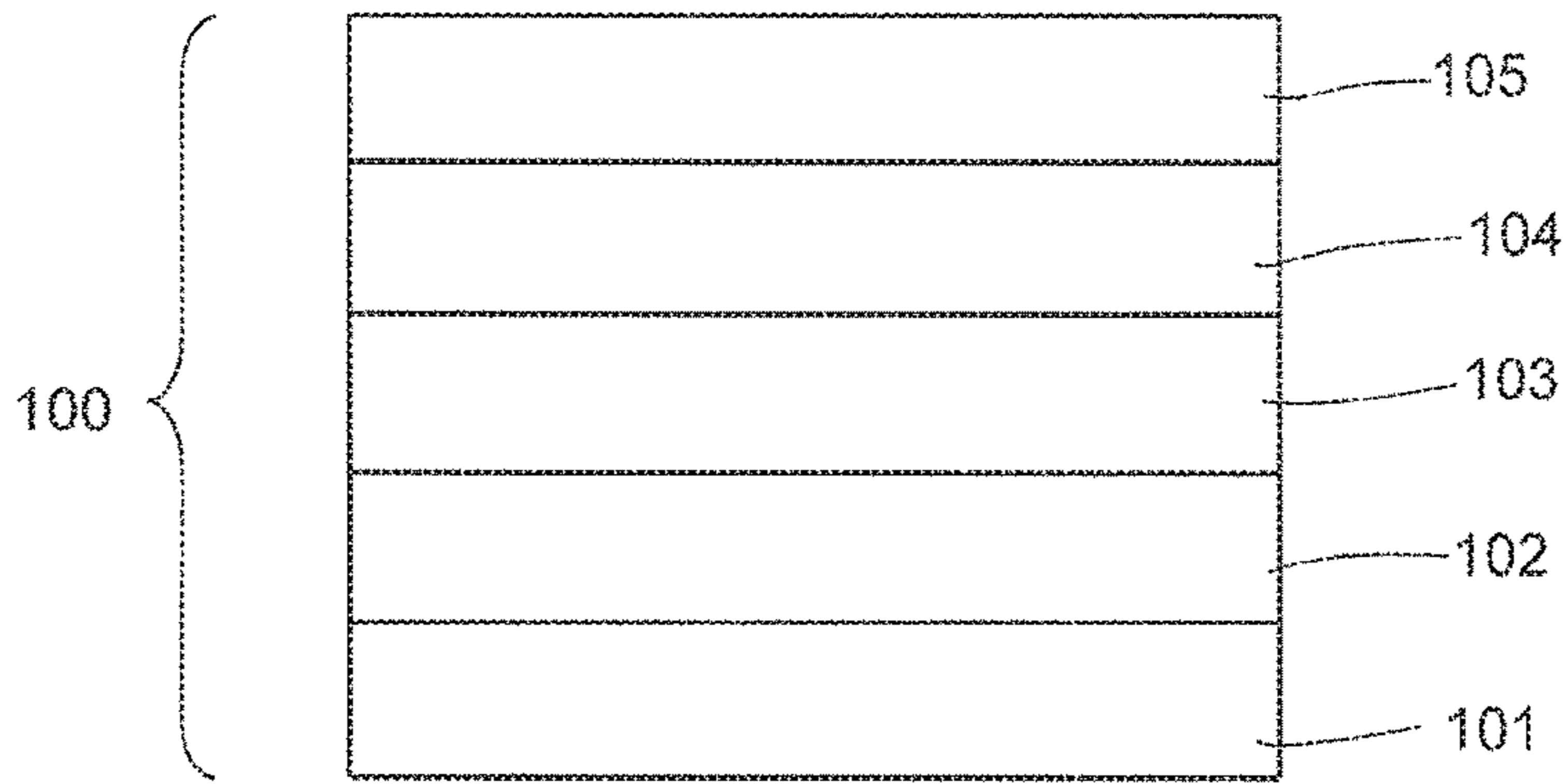


FIG. 1

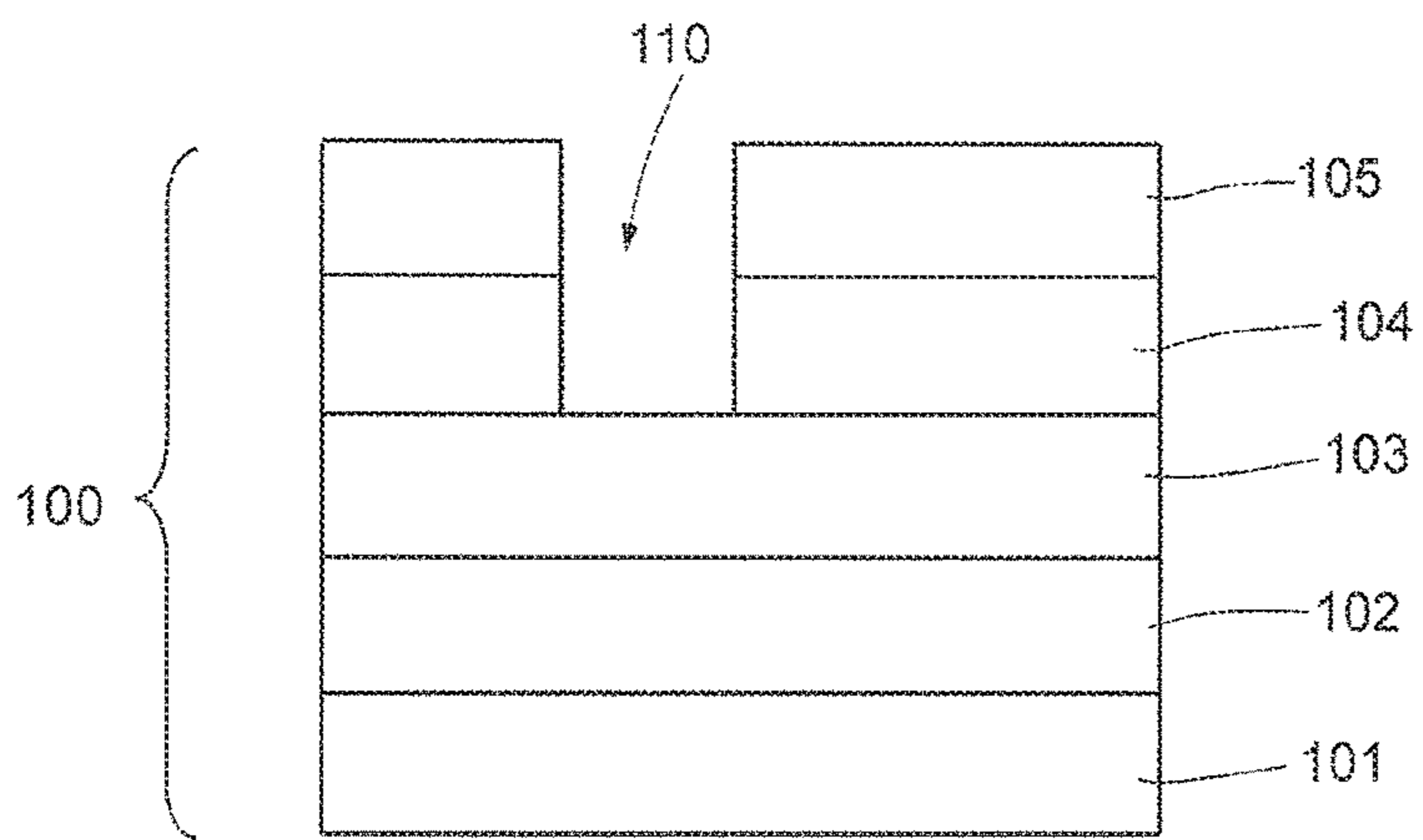


FIG. 2

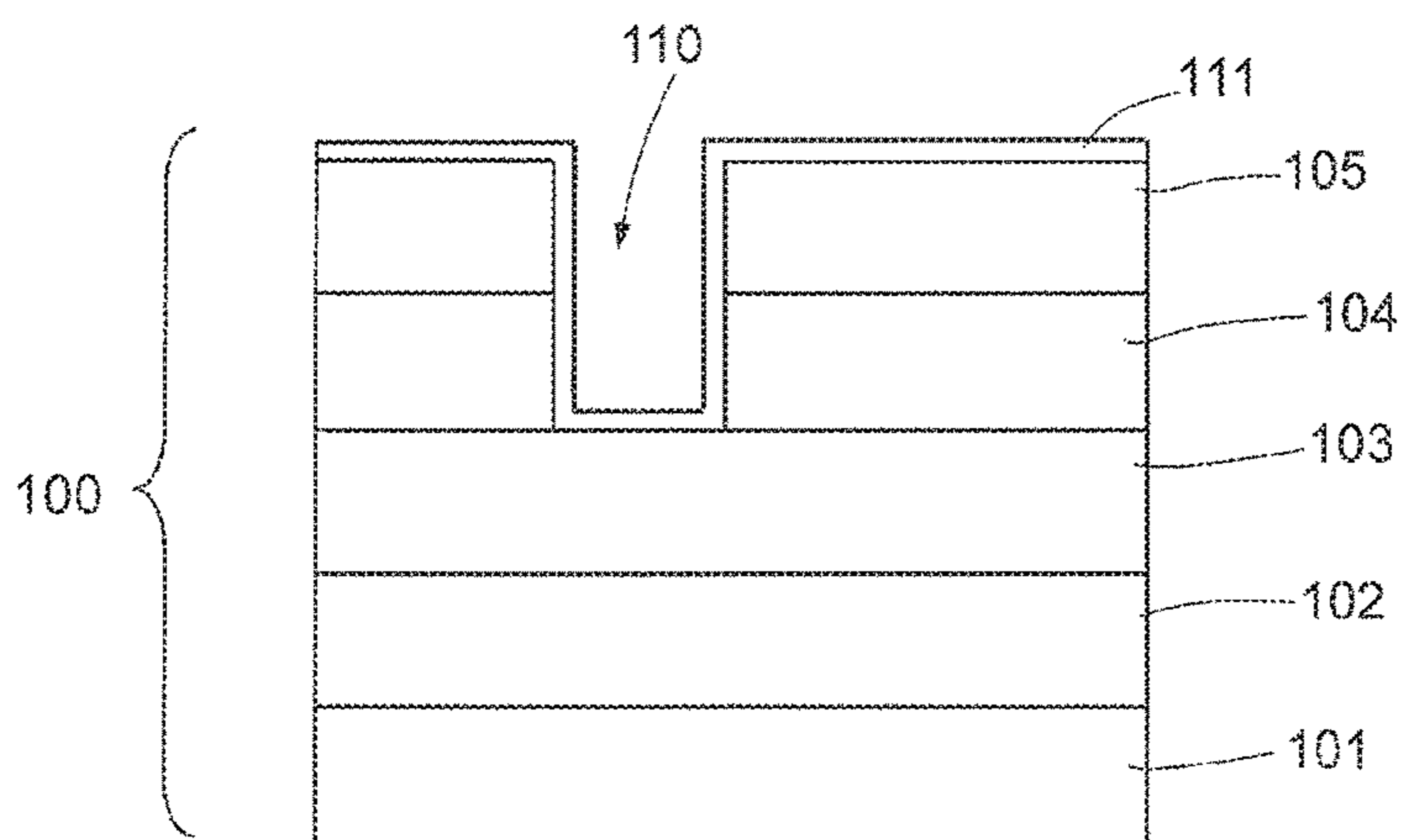


FIG. 3

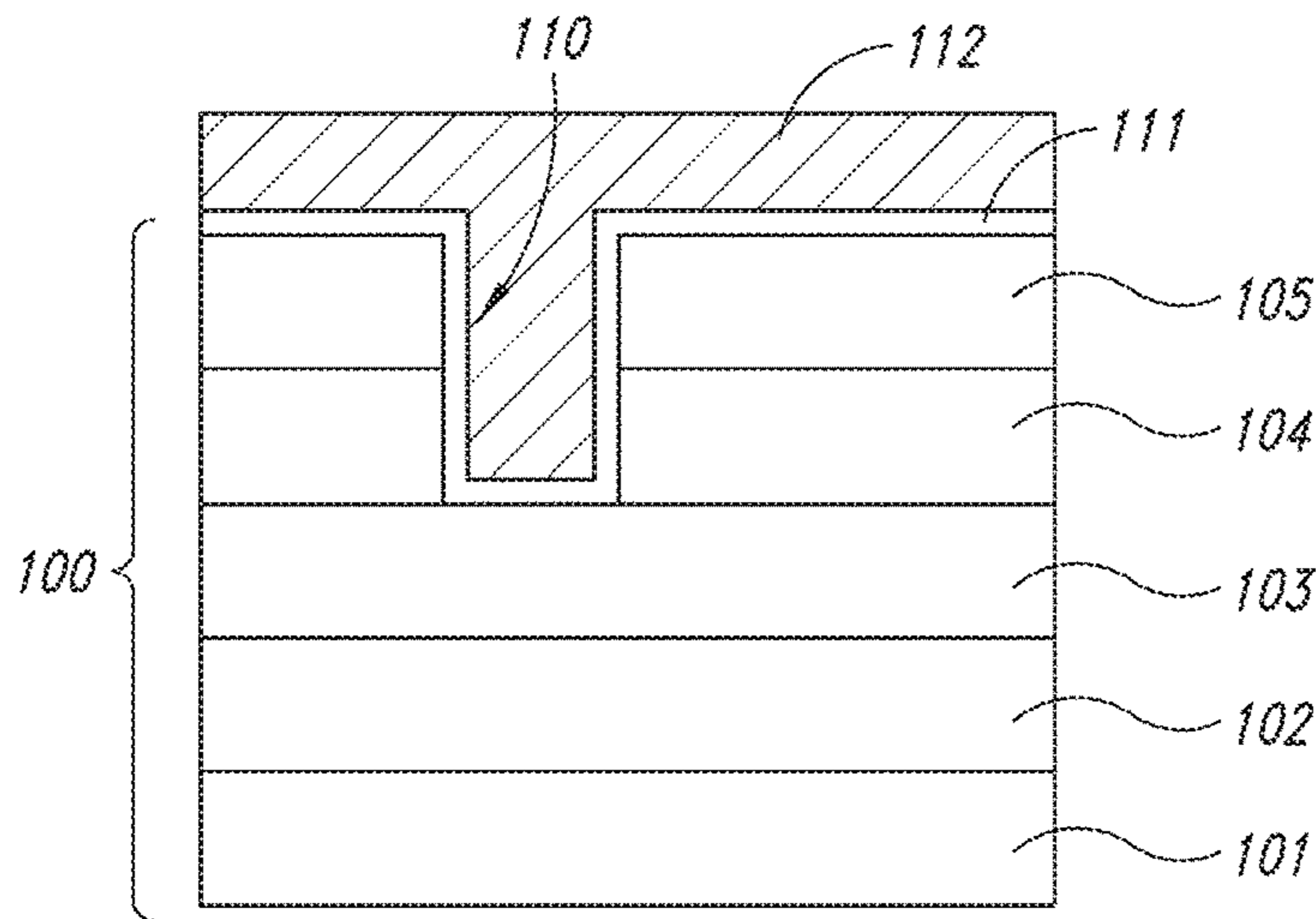


FIG. 4

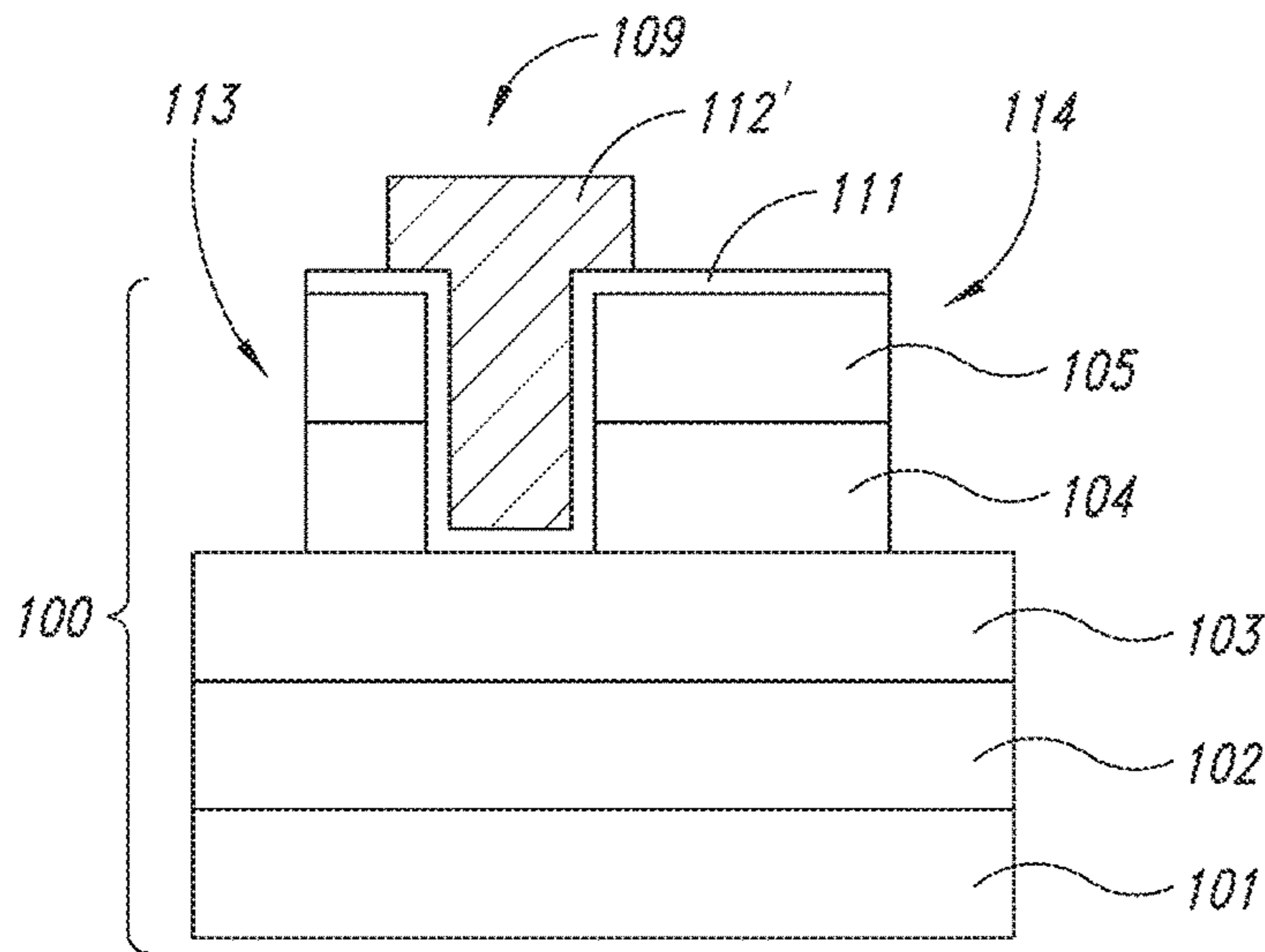


FIG. 5

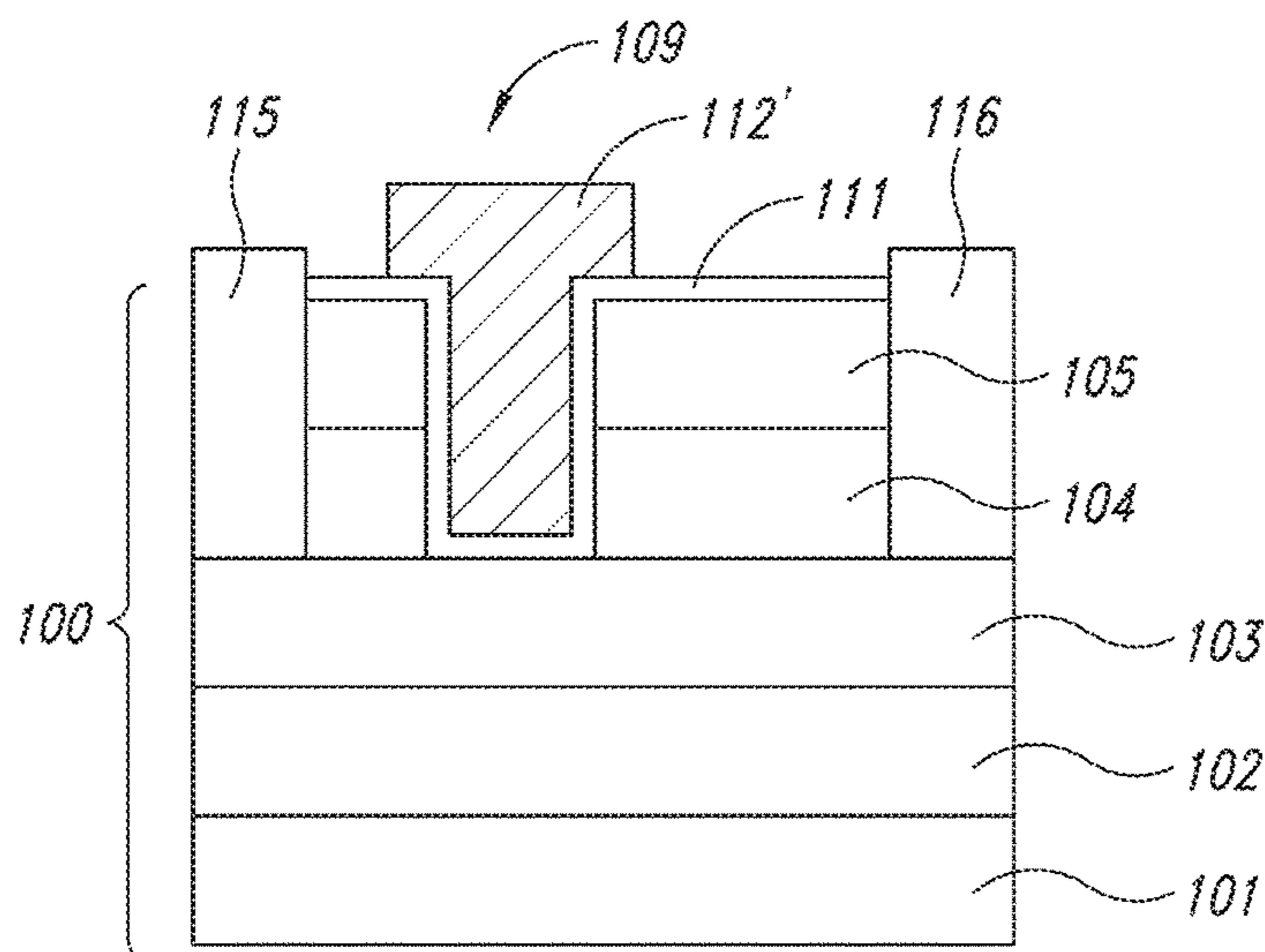


FIG. 6

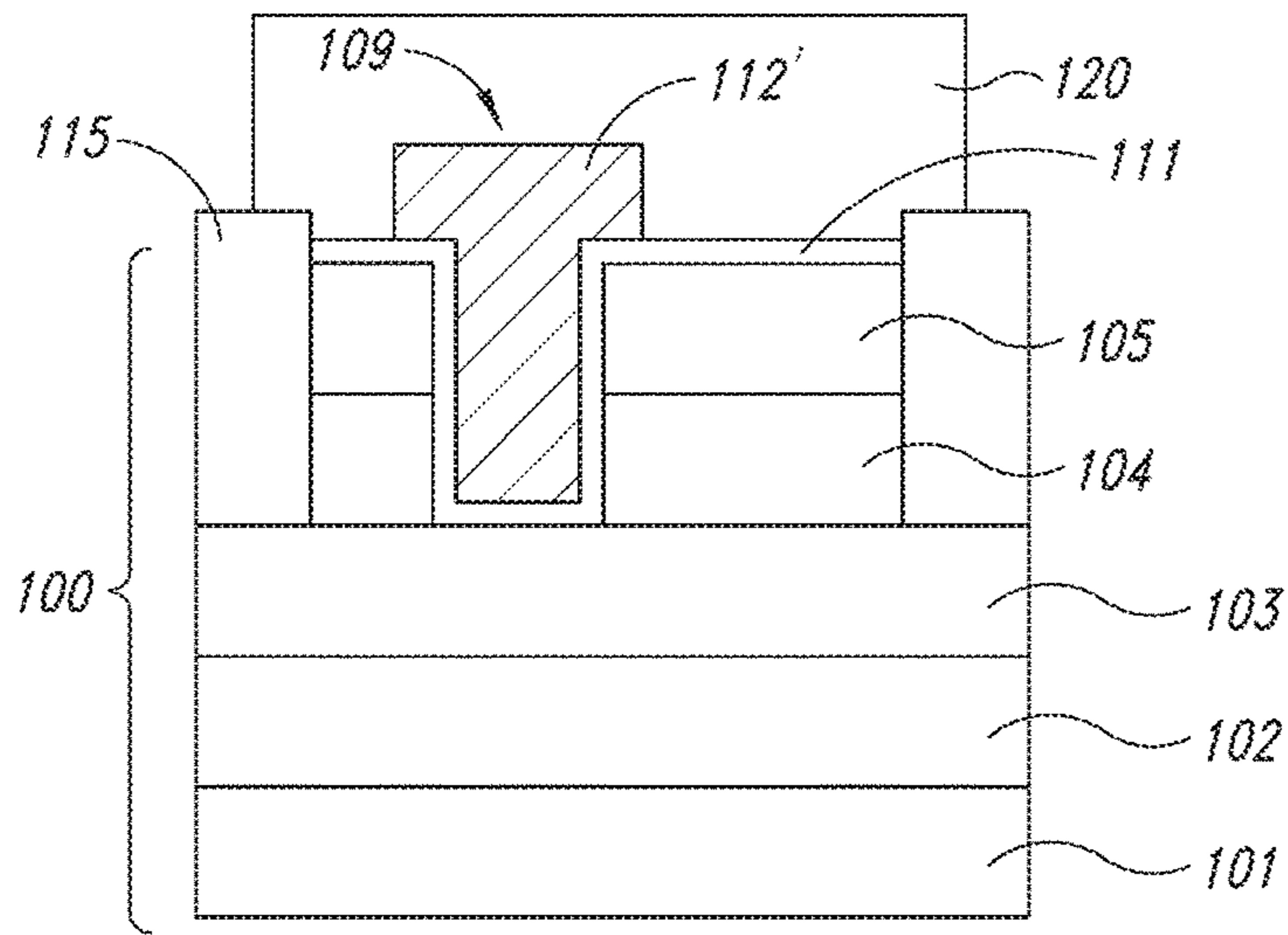


FIG. 7

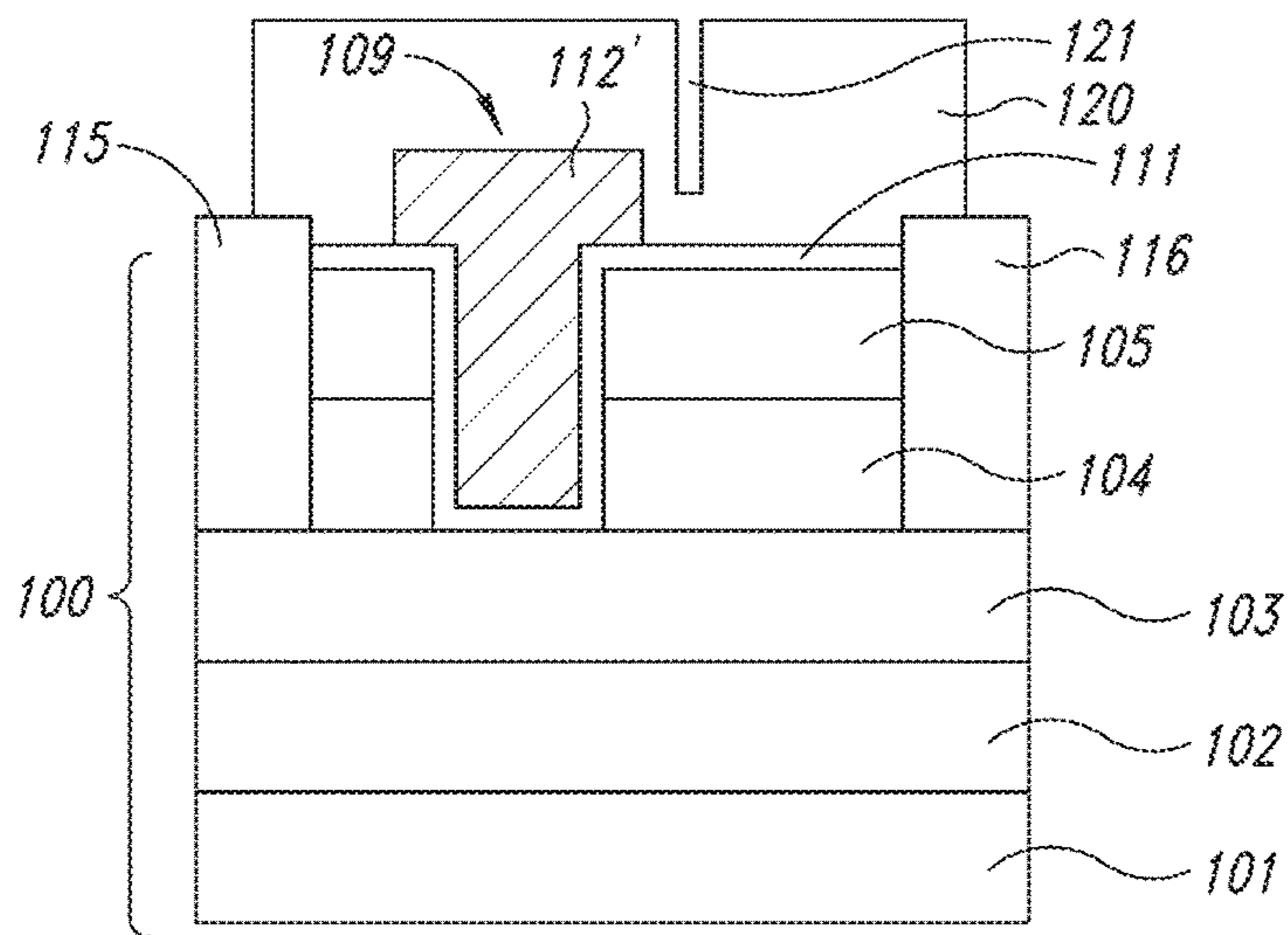


FIG. 8

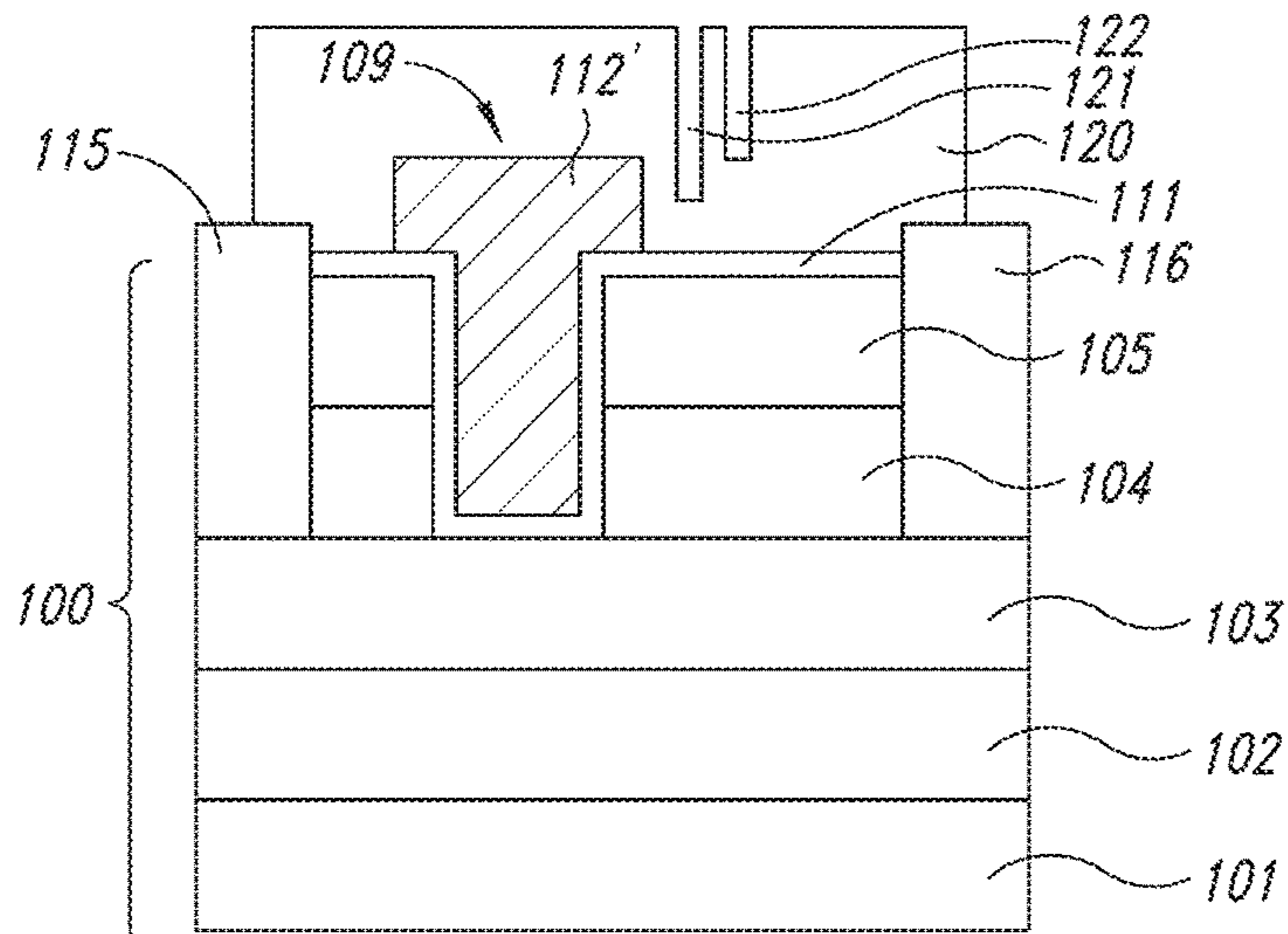


FIG. 9

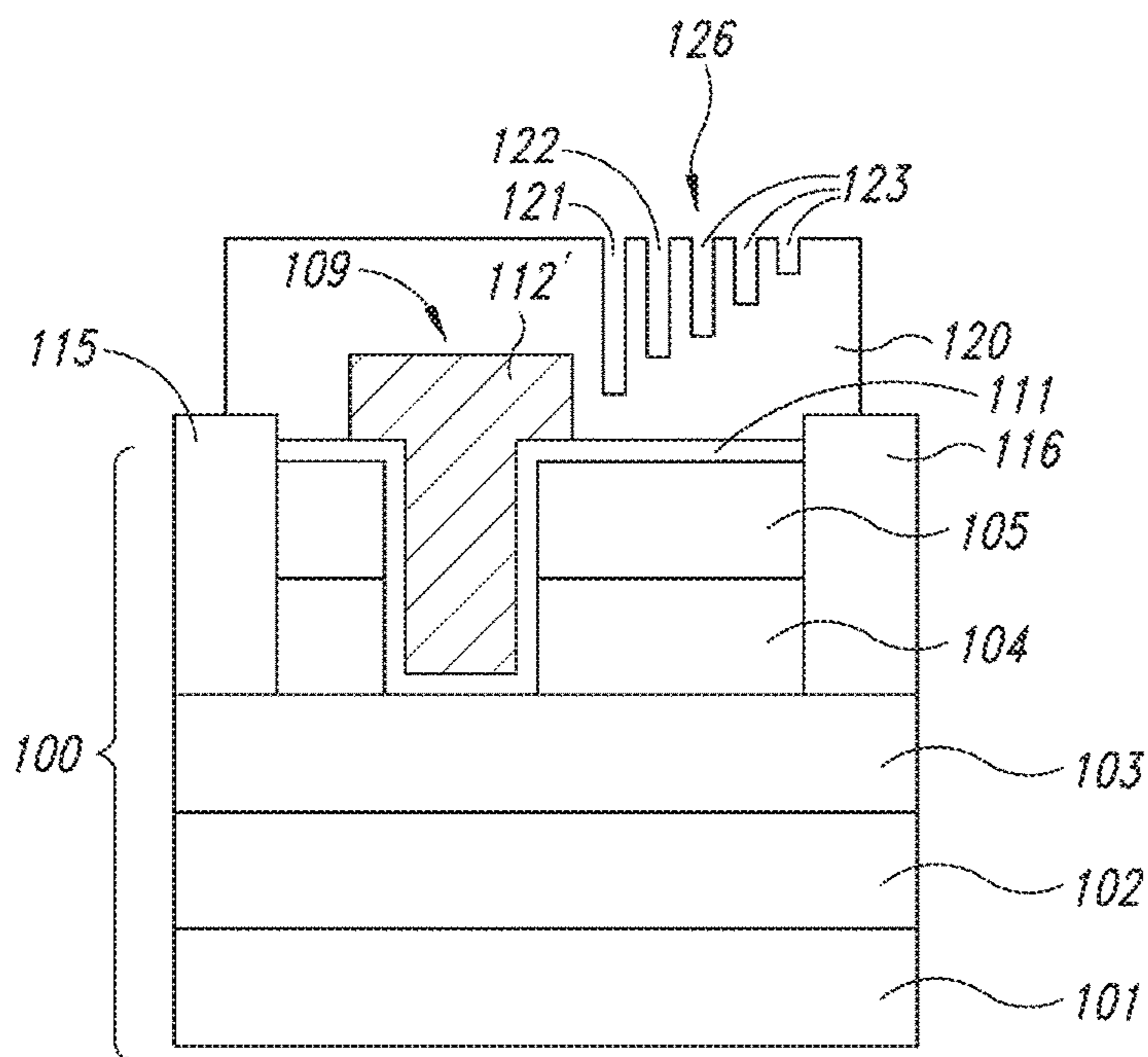


FIG. 10

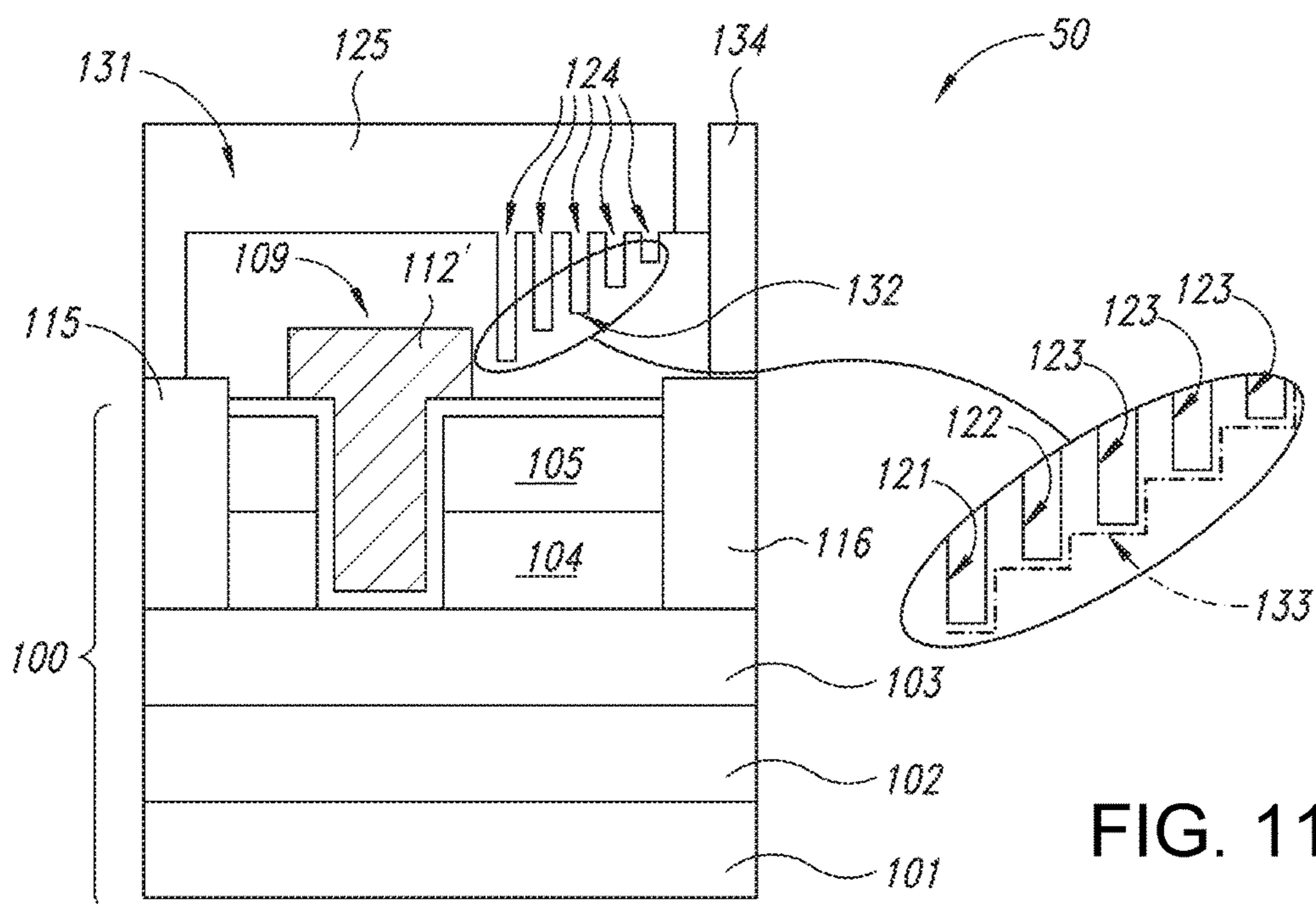


FIG. 11

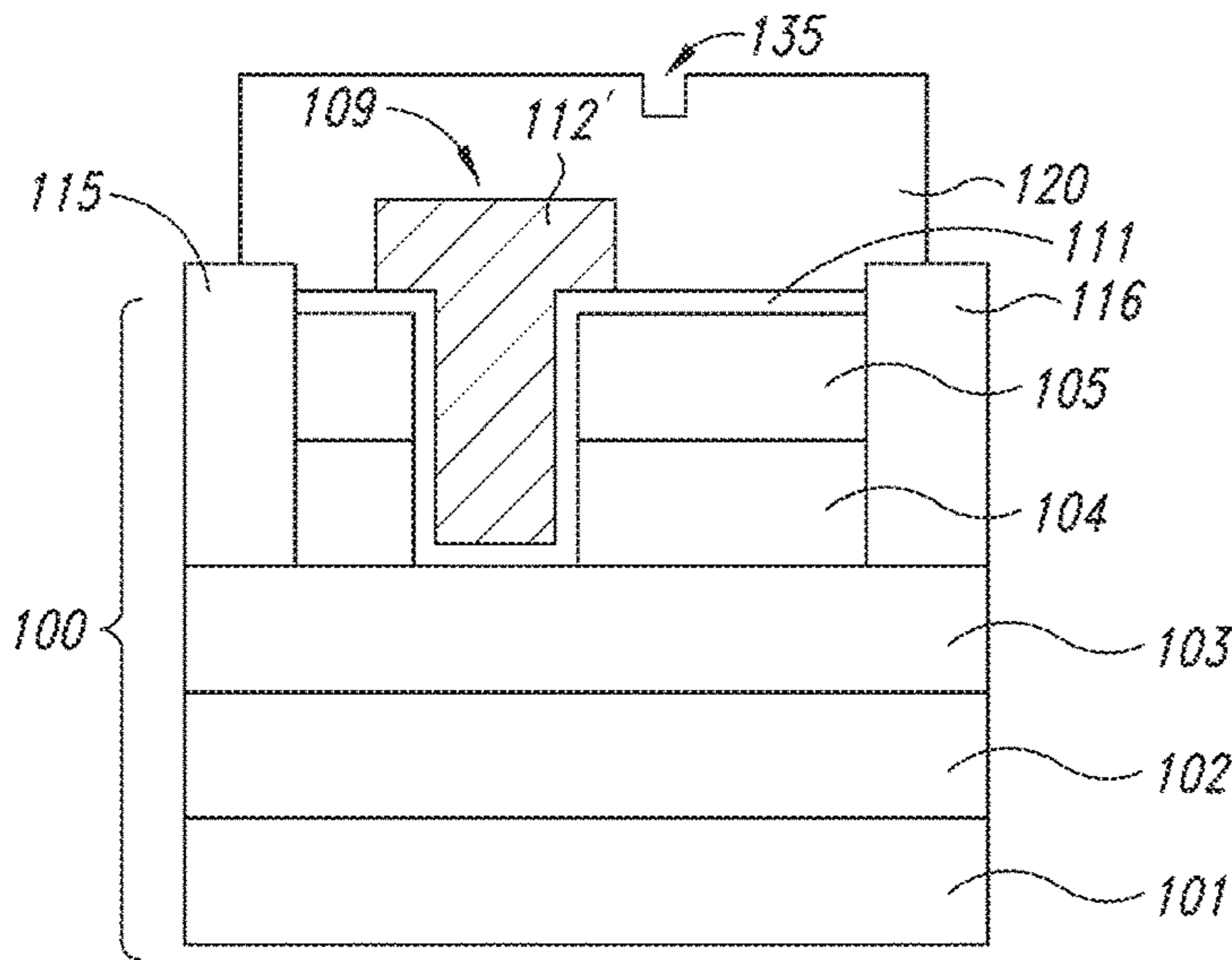


FIG. 12

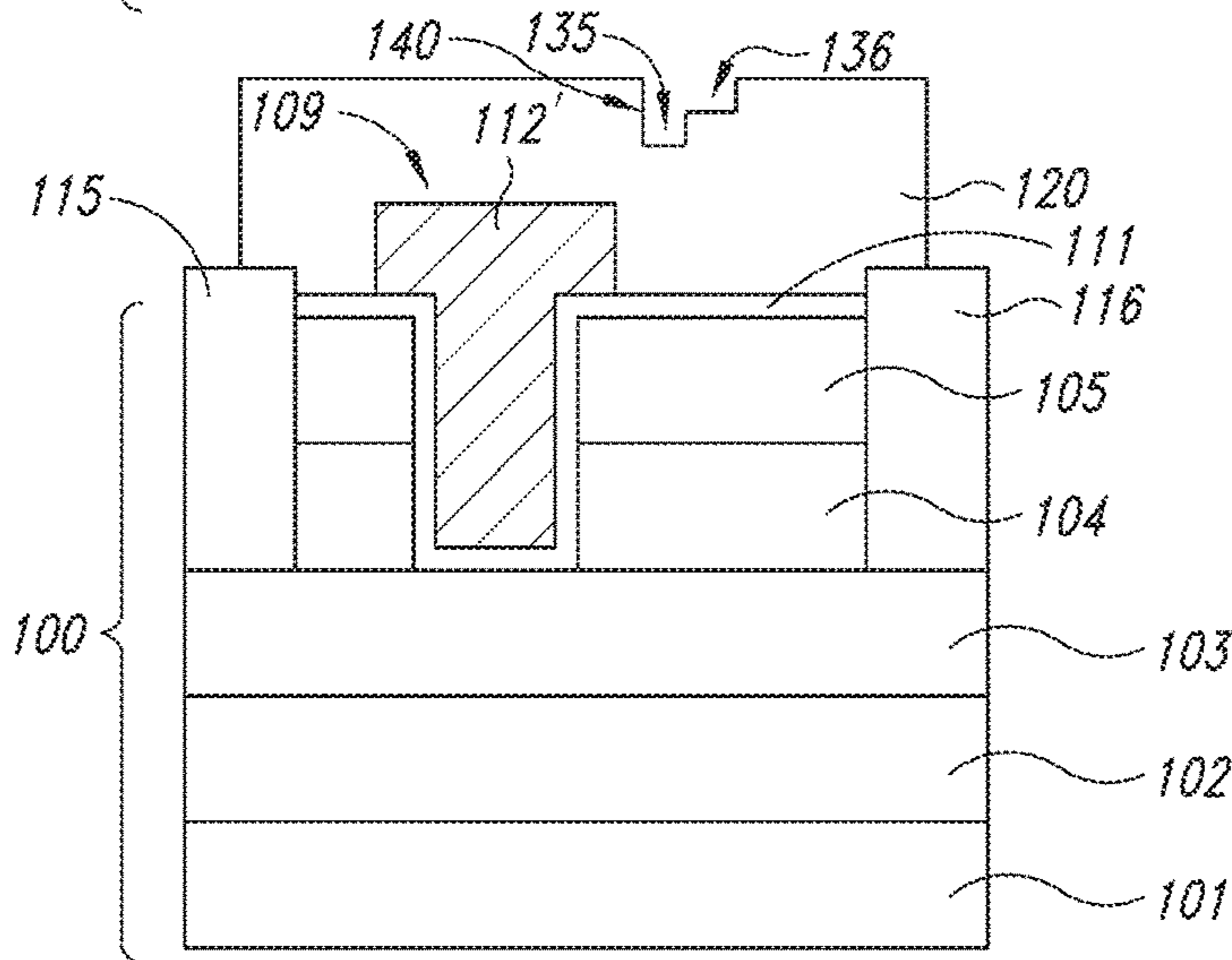


FIG. 13

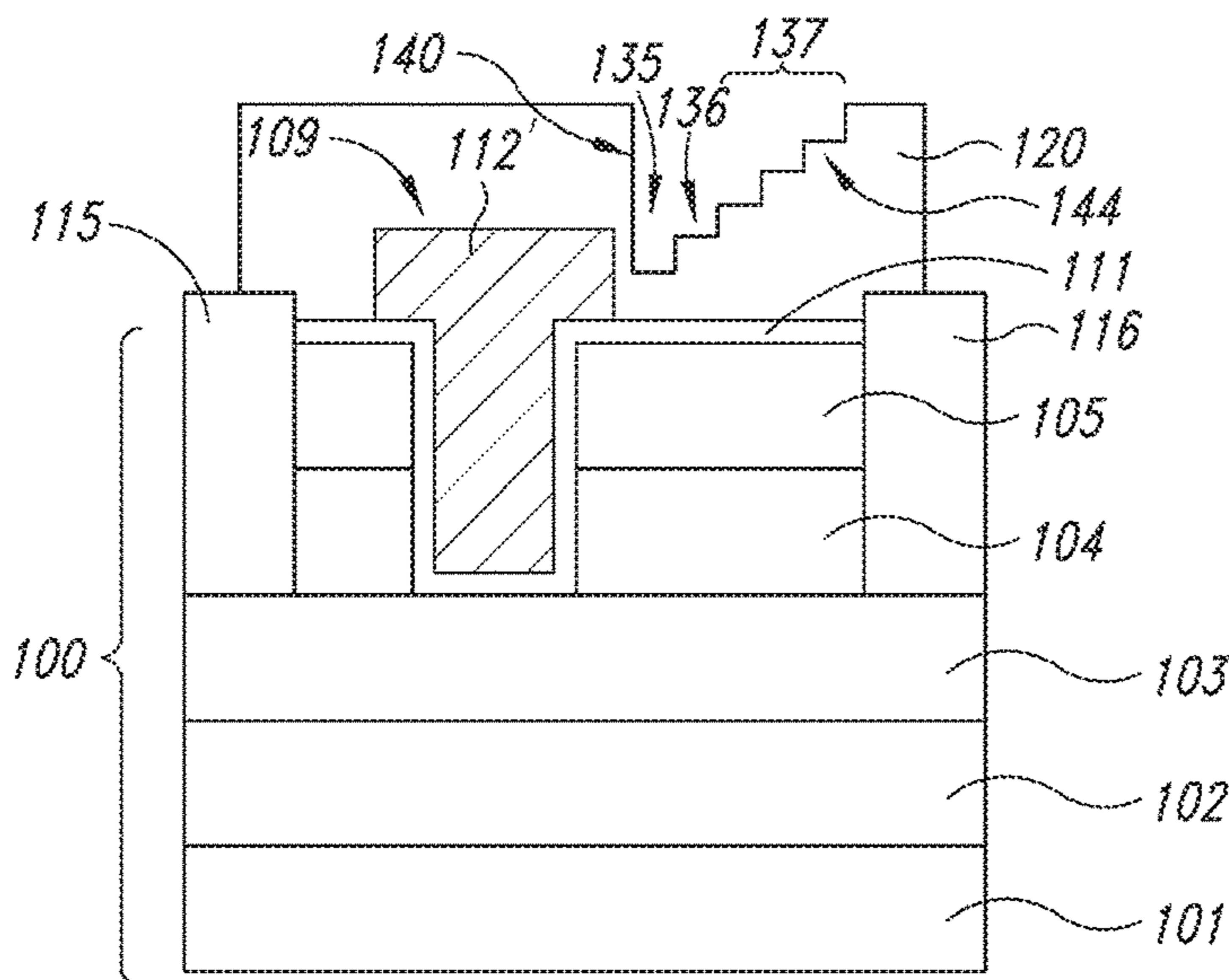


FIG. 14

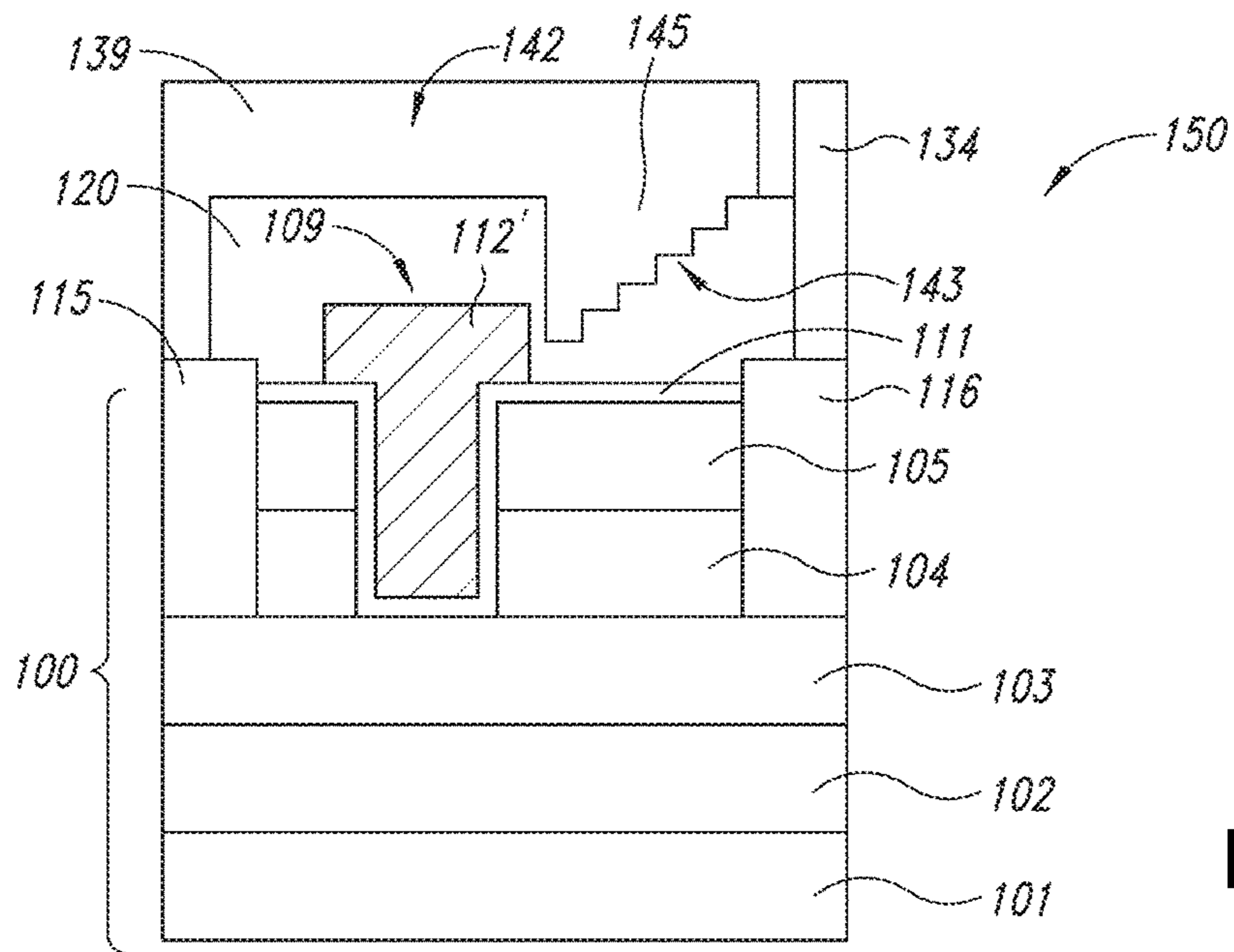


FIG. 15

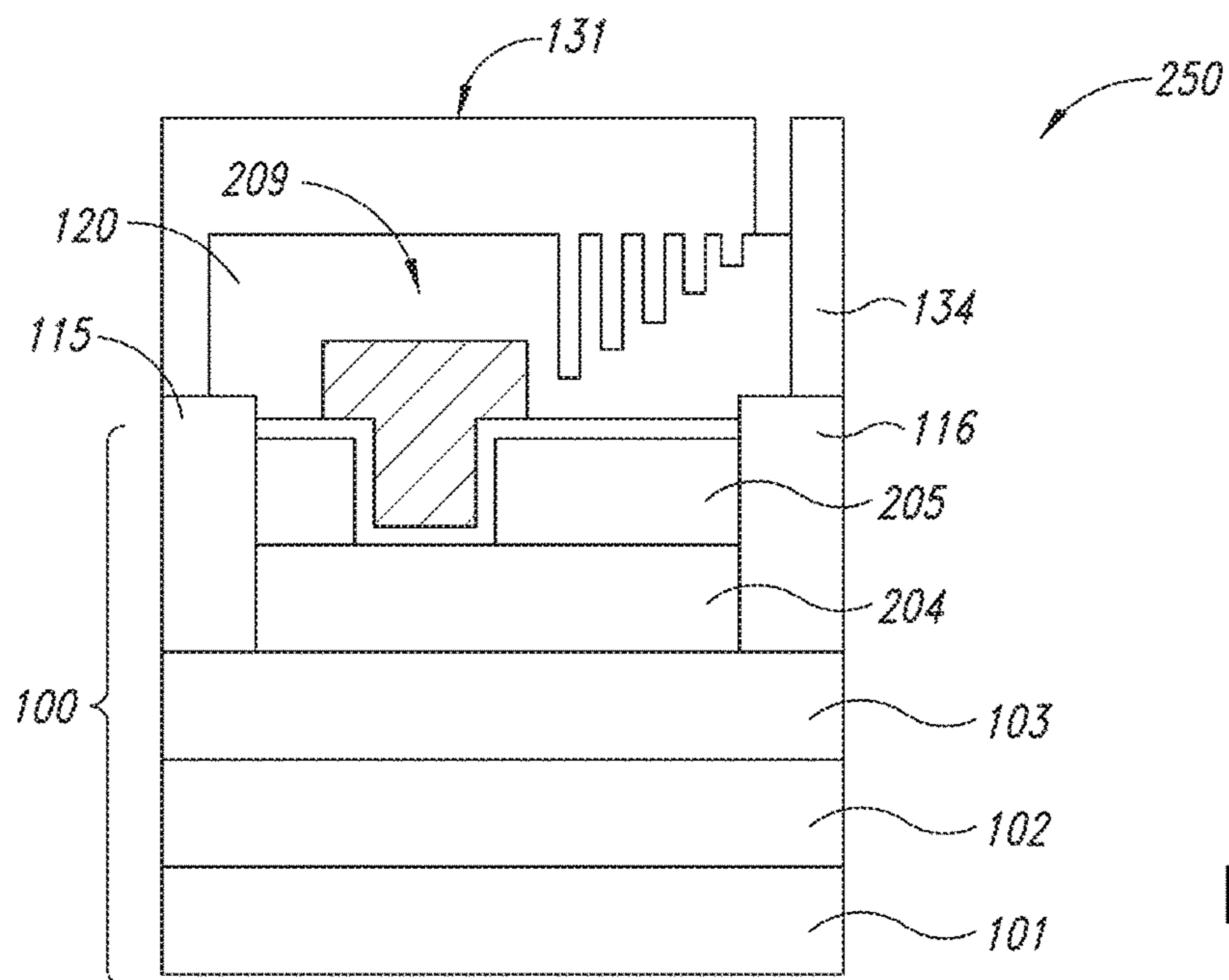


FIG. 16

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HIGH-POWER AND HIGH-FREQUENCY HERETOSTRUCTURE FIELD-EFFECT TRANSISTOR

BACKGROUND

Technical Field

The present disclosure relates to a high-power and high-frequency heterostructure field-effect transistor.

Description of the Related Art

As is known, AlGa_N/Ga_N heterostructures have drawn high interest for manufacturing high-power and high-frequency field-effect transistors, by virtue of the high breakdown voltage of the material and the high density and mobility of carrier ions in the two-dimensional electron gas (2DEG).

High-electron-mobility transistors (HEMTs) based on AlGa_N/Ga_N are generally grown on a silicon substrate, since cheap substrates based of gallium nitride (Ga_N) are not available. Therefore, the device is horizontal and the source, drain, and gate electrodes are arranged on the upper surface of the wafer. Thus, the wafer breakdown voltage is linked both to the vertical breakdown voltage and to the lateral distance between the source and the drain electrodes.

Although gallium nitride and its alloys are wide band-gap and high breakdown semiconductors, one of the critical aspects of HEMT power devices of gallium nitride is obtaining a good electrical field distribution during switch-off.

Therefore, the structure of an HEMT is carefully studied in order to optimize the electrical field distribution and to allow the device to operate at a maximum switching rate, when subjected to a high voltage variation. Without an appropriate shaping of the existing electrical field, in fact, the latter may cause injection of electrons in traps, thus degrading the output current and the on-state resistance during switching. This phenomenon is frequently referred to as dynamic degradation, current drop, or DC-RF dispersion.

To prevent this phenomenon, in microwave applications, it has been proposed to use a V-shaped gate region with an integrated slant field plate (see, e.g., Y. Dora, et al. "High Breakdown Voltage Achieved on AlGa_N/Ga_N HEMTs With Integrated Slant Field Plates", IEEE ELECTRON DEVICE LETTERS, Vol. 27, N. 9, September 2006, pp. 713-715 and R. Chu et al. "V-Gate Ga_N HEMTs for X-Band Power Applications", IEEE ELECTRON DEVICE LETTERS, Vol. 29, No. 9, September 2008, pp. 974-976). For high-voltage applications, the use of a structure has also been proposed having a plurality of separate, overlying field plates, to increase the operating voltage (multiple-field-plate solution, see, e.g., H. Xing et al. "High-Breakdown Voltage AlGa_N/Ga_N HEMTs Achieved by Multiple Field Plates", IEEE ELECTRON DEVICE LETTERS, Vol. 25, No. 4, April 2004, pp. 161-163). Another known solution (see R. Chu et al. "1200-V Normally Off Ga_N-on-Si Field-Effect Transistors with Low Dynamic On-Resistance", IEEE ELECTRON DEVICE LETTERS, VOL. 32, No. 5, May 2011, pp. 632-634) shows a different multiple field plate having overlying portions, in mutual electrical contact. A similar approach is described in U.S. Pat. No. 8,530,978 B1, but with a sloped field plate connected to the source electrode.

In particular, the device described in U.S. Pat. No. 8,530,978 B1 comprises a stack of AlGa_N/Ga_N epitaxial layers on a silicon substrate. A passivation layer of dielectric material covers the stack of epitaxial layers and accommodates

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source and drain electrodes, a gate electrode, a first field plate connected to the gate region, and a second field plate connected to the source electrode. The second field plate has a sloped bottom surface. The first field plate, connected to the gate region, is intended to prevent charge trapping at low voltage.

The sloped shape of the second field plate is obtained by exposing a photoresist through a greyscale mask. This mask allows to modulate the intensity of the passing light and to obtain a sloped profile in the photoresist. This profile is then transferred onto the underlying dielectric layer by dry etching. The process for forming the sloped field plate is simpler and faster than the process for forming a plurality of separate field plates since the latter requires numerous successive metal deposition and definition steps.

The presence of a sloped field plate enables the increase of the dynamic on-state resistance at 600 V to be reduced from 47%, that may be achieved with the multiple-field-plate device, to 19%. The improvement of performance is thought to be due to a more linear profile of the electrical field, which can be achieved by virtue of the sloped field plate.

However, also the solution with sloped field plate is not free from disadvantages. In fact, it involves a complex manufacturing process and a final planarization step. Forming the sloped field plate is thus costly and may not be sufficiently controllable.

BRIEF SUMMARY

At least some embodiments of the present disclosure provide a different manufacturing process and a new HEMT device having a field plate with a sloped surface.

According to the present disclosure, a manufacturing process and a heterostructure field-effect transistor are provided.

In practice, to form the field plate, the dielectric layer overlying the gate, drain, and source regions is subjected to a plurality of successive etching steps such as to form a cavity, connected or not connected, with a bottom surface or an underside envelope having a plurality of steps, thereby meaning a plurality of discontinuous surface portions adjacent to each other, wherein each surface portion extends at a different distance from the underlying wafer with respect to adjacent surface portions.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

For a better understanding of the present disclosure, preferred embodiments thereof are now described, purely by way of non-limiting example, with reference to the attached drawings, wherein:

FIGS. 1-11 are cross-sections through a semiconductor material wafer in successive manufacturing steps of a first embodiment of the present field-effect HEMT device;

FIGS. 12-15 are cross-sections through a semiconductor material wafer in successive manufacturing steps of a second embodiment of the present field-effect HEMT device; and

FIG. 16 shows a cross-section of a variant of the device of FIG. 11.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

FIG. 1 shows a portion of a wafer 100 for manufacturing an HEMT device, according to one embodiment of the

present device. In particular, the described embodiment regards a heterostructure field-effect transistor of AlGaIn/GaN.

The wafer **100** comprises a substrate **101** of, e.g., silicon, silicon carbide (SiC), or sapphire (Al₂O₃), overlaid by a buffer layer **102**, for example of aluminum gallium nitride (AlGaIn) or of indium gallium nitride (InGaIn). A channel layer **103** extends on the buffer layer **102** and is here of intrinsic gallium nitride (GaN), having a thickness of, e.g., ca. 10 nm to ca. 10 μm. A barrier layer **104**, here of aluminum and gallium nitride (AlGaIn) of an intrinsic type, extends on the channel layer **103**, in contact therewith, and has a thickness of, e.g., ca. 5 nm and ca. 400 nm. A passivation layer **105** of dielectric material such as silicon nitride (Si₃N₄) or silicon oxide (SiO₂) extends on the barrier layer **104**.

As shown in FIG. 2, the passivation layer **105** and the barrier layer **104** are selectively removed at the portion of the wafer **100** where, in subsequent steps, a gate region of the HEMT device is to be formed. For instance, lithography steps are carried out, including etching of the passivation layer **105** and dry etching of the barrier layer **104** so as to remove selective portions thereof. A trench **110** is thus formed, which extends throughout the thickness of the passivation layer **105** and of the barrier layer **104**.

Next, FIG. 3, a gate insulation layer **111** is deposited, for example made of a material chosen from aluminum nitride (AlN), silicon nitride (SiN), aluminum oxide (Al₂O₃), or silicon oxide (SiO₂). The gate insulation layer **111** may have a thickness of between 1 and 50 nm, for example, 20 nm.

Then, as shown in FIG. 4, a conductive layer **112** is deposited on the gate insulation layer **111** and fills the trench **110**. For instance, the conductive layer **112** is made of metal material, such as tantalum (Ta), tantalum nitride (TaN), titanium nitride (TiN), palladium (Pd), tungsten (W), tungsten silicide (WSi₂), titanium aluminum (Ti/Al), or nickel gold (Ni/Au).

The conductive layer **112** is then selectively removed (FIG. 5), through lithographic and etching steps per se known so as to remove the conductive layer **112** from the wafer **100**, except for the portion extending in the trench **110** and for an adjacent portion, projecting from the wafer **100**. A gate metallization **112'** is thus formed. The gate metallization **112'** and the gate insulation layer **111** form, as a whole, the gate region, designated as a whole by **109**, of the HEMT device. Then, one or more further masked etching steps of the gate insulation layer **111**, of the passivation layer **105**, and of the barrier layer **104** are carried out at the areas of the wafer **100** where the source and drain electrodes of the HEMT device are to be formed. In particular, openings **113** and **114** are formed on opposite sides of the gate region **109** and at a distance therefrom.

Next, as shown in FIG. 6, ohmic contacts are formed to provide the source and drain electrodes **115**, **116**. To this end, conductive material is deposited, in particular metal such as titanium (Ti) or aluminum (Al), or their alloys or compounds, by sputtering or evaporation, on the wafer **100** and in particular inside the openings **113**, **114**. The metal layer thus deposited is then etched so as to remove it from the wafer **100**, except for the portions extending in the openings **113** and **114**, forming therein, respectively, source and drain electrode electrodes **115**, **116**.

Then, FIG. 7, a dielectric layer **120** is deposited, for example of silicon nitride or silicon oxide or TEOS (tetraethylorthosilicate)/SOG(Spin-On-Glass)/TEOS, which coats the source and drain electrodes **115**, **116**, the gate region **109**, and the gate insulation layer **111**. The dielectric

layer **120** thus obtained is then planarized (for example via CMP—Chemical Mechanical Polishing). Next, portions of the dielectric layer **120** are selectively removed, by a photolithographic process followed by an etch, for example a dry plasma etch, a wet etch or a combination of these, at the source and drain electrodes **115**, **116**.

Next, FIG. 8, the dielectric layer **120** is etched, by a lithographic process followed by etching, for example dry plasma etching, wet etching, or a combination of these, to form a first trench **121**. The first trench **121** extends directly over the area of the wafer **100** which is arranged between the gate region **109** and the drain electrode **116**, through most of the thickness of the dielectric layer **120**, but stops at a distance from the gate insulation layer **111**, for example at 50 nm.

Next, FIG. 9, a second trench **122** is created, with a same process, adjacent to the first trench **121**. In particular, the second trench **122** is arranged between the first trench **121** and the vertical line passing through the drain electrode **116** and extends through the dielectric layer **120**; moreover, its depth is slightly smaller than the first trench **121**, for example its bottom end is arranged at 200 nm from the gate insulation layer **111**.

Then, FIG. 10, using the same process as described with reference to FIGS. 8 and 9, a plurality of trenches **123** are formed, adjacent to the second trench **122**. The plurality of trenches **123** is arranged between the second trench **122** and the vertical line passing through the drain electrode **116** and extends through the thickness of the dielectric layer **120** so that each trench **123** is less deep than the adjacent one, moving toward the gate region **109**, and deeper than the adjacent one, moving toward the drain electrode **116**. As a whole, the plurality of trenches **121-123** forms a non-connected cavity **126**.

Next, FIG. 11, a metal layer is deposited on the dielectric layer **120**. The metal layer is in direct electrical contact with the source electrode **115** and drain electrode **116** where the dielectric layer **120** has been removed. Then, the metal layer is defined, according to a photolithographic process, thereby forming a field plate **131** and a drain contact **134**. The field plate **131** comprises a planar portion **125** on the dielectric layer **120** and a projecting region formed by a plurality of fingers **124** projecting inside trenches **121**, **122**, and **123**. The planar portion **125** is in direct electrical contact with the source electrode **115** and forms a source contact. The drain contact **134** is in direct electrical contact with the drain electrode **116**.

The field plate **131** thus has, towards the wafer **100**, an envelope surface or profile **133** (see in particular the enlarged detail) defined by a plurality of steps **132** having a distance, from the wafer **100**, that increases moving from the gate region **109** to the drain electrode **116**. In practice, the envelope surface **133** defines on average a surface that is sloped with respect to the surface plane of the wafer **100** and thus allows an optimization of the electrical field to be obtained and therefore a high breakdown voltage also during high-power operation, as discussed previously.

The final wafer **100'** thus obtained is thus planar and does not require further planarization steps. After dicing, a plurality of normally off HEMT devices **50** is obtained.

In a different embodiment, initially the same manufacturing steps are carried out as described previously with reference to FIGS. 1-7. Next, FIG. 12, the dielectric layer **120** is etched, according to the same process as the previous embodiment, in a first area **135** arranged between the

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vertical line passing through the gate region **109** and the vertical line passing through the drain electrode **116**, forming a cavity **140**.

Here, the dielectric layer **120** is etched for a depth smaller than in the embodiment of FIG. **8**, for the reason that will be explained hereinafter.

Then, FIG. **13**, a second etch of the dielectric layer **120** is carried out. In detail, the second etch removes selective portions of the dielectric layer **120** in the first area **135** and in a second area **136**, adjacent and contiguous to the first area **135**, moving toward the drain electrode **116**. Thereby, a widening and deepening of the cavity **140** is obtained, and the cavity now occupies the second area **136** and, in the first area **135**, has a depth caused by the first and second etches.

Next, FIG. **14**, one or more further etches of the dielectric layer **120** are performed in the first and second areas **135**, **136** and in a plurality of areas **137**, adjacent and contiguous to each other as well as to the second area **136**, arranged between the second area **136** and the vertical line passing through the drain electrode **116**. Thereby, a further widening and deepening of the cavity **140** is obtained. Consequently, the cavity **140**, in the first area **135**, has a depth given by the sum of all the etches, in the second area **136** has a depth determined by the sum of the second and further etches and, in the plurality of areas **137**, a depth that is progressively smaller. In this way, the cavity **140**, in each further area **137**, has a depth smaller than in an adjacent area moving toward the gate region **109** and a depth greater than in an adjacent area **137** moving toward the drain electrode **116**.

At the end of the etching phase, in the embodiment of FIGS. **12-15**, a single cavity **140** extends inside the dielectric layer **120**; the cavity **140** is delimited, towards the wafer **100**, by a staircase surface **144**, the steps whereof are arranged at an increasing distance from the wafer **100** moving from the gate region **109** to the drain electrode **116**.

Next, FIG. **15**, a metal layer is deposited over the dielectric layer **120**, similar to what described with reference to FIG. **11**. Then, the metal layer is defined, according to a photolithographic process, so as to obtain a field plate **142** and the drain contact **134**. Here, the field plate **142** comprises the planar portion **139** and a single projecting portion **145**, the bottom surface whereof (towards the wafer **100**) reproduces the shape of the cavity **140** and thus has a plurality of steps **143**.

After dicing the final wafer **100'**, an HEMT device **150** is obtained, which also here is of a normally off type.

FIG. **16** shows a different embodiment where the gate region **209** extends through the passivation layer **205** alone and not through the barrier layer **204**, thus forming an HEMT device **250** of a normally on type.

In FIG. **16**, the field plate **131** is formed as in the first embodiment and has a plurality of projecting fingers **124** delimited by an envelope surface **133** defined by a plurality of steps **132**.

As an alternative thereto, an HEMT device of a normally on type may be formed with a field plate having a single projecting portion, similar to the field plate **142** of FIG. **14**, in a manner not shown.

The HEMT device described herein and the corresponding manufacturing process are advantageous as compared to the known solutions. In fact, the device has high planarity following upon a single planarization operation, thus facilitating electrical connection and not requiring repeated costly planarizations. Furthermore, the manufacturing process described comprises manufacturing steps that are in per se standard in semiconductor technology and are thus reliable and easy to control. The field plate **131**, **142**, as a whole, has

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a profile sloped towards the wafer **100**, thus ensuring the desired optimization of the electrical field and voltage strength. The final HEMT device thus has high reliability.

Finally, it is clear that modifications and variations may be made to the process and to the device described and illustrated herein, without thereby departing from the scope of the present disclosure. For instance, the various embodiments described may be combined so as to provide further solutions.

In addition, in all the solutions, the number of steps of the bottom surface of the field plate (defined by the bottom end of the projecting fingers **124** of FIG. **11** or by the steps **132** of the single projecting portion **143** of FIG. **15**) may range from two on.

Furthermore, the depth, width, and mutual distance of each step of the field plate **131**, **142** may vary according the design specifications, and these parameters may be optimized by the designer without any difficulty.

The various embodiments described above can be combined to provide further embodiments. These and other changes can be made to the embodiments in light of the above-detailed description. In general, in the following claims, the terms used should not be construed to limit the claims to the specific embodiments disclosed in the specification and the claims, but should be construed to include all possible embodiments along with the full scope of equivalents to which such claims are entitled. Accordingly, the claims are not limited by the disclosure.

The invention claimed is:

1. A process for manufacturing a heterostructure field-effect transistor, comprising:

in a wafer including a channel layer of a first semiconductor material, a barrier layer of a second semiconductor material, and a passivation layer of dielectric material, forming a gate region extending in the wafer; forming drain and source electrodes extending in the wafer on different sides of the gate region; forming a dielectric layer over the gate region and the passivation layer; and

removing selective portions of the dielectric layer through a plurality of etches so as to form one or more cavities directly above a region of the wafer between the gate region and the drain electrode, the one or more cavities including a plurality of steps at different distances from the wafer; and

completely filling the one or more cavities with conductive material to form a field plate electrically coupled to the source electrode and extending over the gate region and inside the one or more cavities, the field plate having a surface that faces the wafer and includes a plurality of steps in the respective steps of the one or more cavities.

2. The process according to claim **1**, wherein: forming the one or more cavities comprises forming a plurality of adjacent trenches arranged at a distance from each other, the trenches having different depths and form the steps of the one or more cavities; and completely filling the one or more cavities includes forming a plurality of projecting fingers, distinct from each other, that completely fill the trenches and extend towards the body.

3. The process according to claim **1**, wherein forming the one or more cavities comprises carrying out a first etch of the dielectric layer in a first area and carrying out a second etch of the dielectric layer in the first area and in a second area contiguous to the first area so as to form a single cavity that includes the plurality of steps of the one or more cavities.

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4. The process according to claim 3, wherein forming the one or more cavities comprises carrying out a third etch of the dielectric layer in the first area, in the second area, and in a third area of the dielectric layer that is contiguous to the second area.

5. The process according to claim 1, wherein forming the one or more cavities comprises forming steps arranged at an increasing distance from the wafer moving from the gate region to the drain electrode.

6. The process according to claim 1, wherein the conductive material is metal.

7. The process according to claim 1, comprising defining the conductive material and forming a planar portion and a source contact of the field plate, as well a drain contact after completely filling the one or more cavities.

8. The process according to claim 2, wherein the field plate includes a planar portion extending over the dielectric layer and the projecting fingers extend from the planar portion inside the dielectric layer towards the body.

9. A method of forming heterostructure field-effect transistor, comprising:

forming source and drain electrodes extending in a body including a channel layer of a first semiconductor material; a barrier layer of a second semiconductor material, over the channel layer; and a passivation layer, over the barrier layer;

forming a gate region extending in the body between the source and drain electrodes;

forming a dielectric layer over the gate region and over the passivation layer; and

forming a field plate of conductive material coupled to the source electrode and extending inside the dielectric layer in an area comprised between the gate region and the drain electrode, the field plate having a surface facing the wafer and having a plurality of steps, wherein the field plate comprises a plurality of projecting fingers, distinct from each other, extending inside the dielectric layer towards the body.

10. The method according to claim 9, wherein the steps have an increasing distance from the body moving from the gate region to the drain electrode.

11. The method according to claim 9, wherein the field plate comprises a planar portion extending over the dielectric layer and the projecting fingers extend from the planar portion inside the dielectric layer towards the body.

12. The method according to claim 9, wherein the projecting fingers include a longest projecting finger that is positioned closed to the gate region among the projecting fingers.

13. The method according to claim 9, wherein forming the gate region includes:

forming a trench in the body;

forming a gate insulating layer lining walls of the trench;

forming a gate electrode in the trench and separated from the body by the gate insulation layer, wherein the gate insulation layer extends between the passivation layer and the dielectric layer.

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14. The method according to claim 9, wherein the gate region extends inside the passivation layer.

15. The method according to claim 9, wherein the gate region extends inside the passivation layer and the barrier region.

16. The method according to claim 9, wherein the first and second semiconductor materials have different band gaps and comprise elements of Groups III-V of the Periodic Table.

17. The method according to claim 16, wherein the channel layer is of gallium nitride, and the barrier layer is of aluminum gallium nitride.

18. The transistor according to claim 9, wherein each projecting finger includes first and second lateral sides opposite to each other and contacting the dielectric layer.

19. A method of making field-effect transistor, comprising:

forming source and drain electrodes extending in a semiconductor body;

forming a gate region extending in the body between the source and drain electrodes;

forming a dielectric layer over the gate region and over the semiconductor body; and

forming a field plate of conductive material coupled to the source electrode and extending inside the dielectric layer in an area comprised between the gate region and the drain electrode, the field plate having a surface facing the wafer and having a plurality of projecting fingers extending into the dielectric layer towards the body and having different lengths, the projecting fingers including a longest projecting finger that is positioned closest to the gate region among the plurality of projecting fingers.

20. The method according to claim 19, further comprising removing selective portions of the dielectric layer through a plurality of etches so as to form one or more cavities directly above a region of the wafer between the gate region and the drain electrode, the one or more cavities including a plurality of steps at different distances from the wafer, wherein the forming the field plate includes filling the one or more cavities with conductive material.

21. The method according to claim 20, wherein forming the one or more cavities comprises carrying out a first etch of the dielectric layer in a first area and carrying out a second etch of the dielectric layer in the first area and in a second area contiguous to the first area so as to form a single cavity that includes the plurality of steps of the one or more cavities.

22. The method according to claim 20, comprising defining the conductive material and forming a planar portion and a source contact of the field plate, as well a drain contact after filling the one or more cavities with the conductive material.

23. The method according to claim 19, wherein the field plate includes a planar portion extending over the dielectric layer and the projecting fingers extend from the planar portion inside the dielectric layer towards the body.

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